



# Northumberland County Council

**Strategic Planning Committee**

**3<sup>rd</sup> October 2023**

## **ADDENDUM REPORT**

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**Application No:** 23/00545/RENE

**Proposal:**

Erection of ground-mounted solar farm with associated ancillary equipment

**Site Address:**

Land North East Of Wooperton Station, Wooperton, Northumberland

**Applicant:**

A&J Scott Sawmills Limited

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that this application is approved as a departure to policy MIN 8 subject to the conditions appended below.

**1. Introduction**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the recent third-party representation from Mr Colin Robert Davidson of 18 Belle Vue Gardens, Alnwick.

1.2 Furthermore, by way of update there is a typo in the original officer report at the reasoning for condition three. This has been updated below to now reference the correct policies of the Local Plan.

**2. Details**

2.1 Officers are in receipt of comments submitted by Mr Davidson who would like the planning authority to consider the proximity of the proposals to the disused Alnwick to Cornhill railway line. There is an ongoing project to convert part of the Alnwick end of the route into a Greenway for the benefit of pedestrians, cyclists etc. Mr Davidson asks that the proposal takes consideration of this aspiration. It should be noted that Mr Davidson raises no objection or support for the proposal and states his support the renewable energy projects.

### **3. Comment**

3.1 Officers are supportive of the principle of the route. However, the route currently has no formal designation and therefore officers cannot offer any conditions or assistance at this time to seek amendments to the scheme. However, we do suggest an informative to the applicant asking they consider providing a path around the site to allow the future realisation of this project.

### **4. Recommendation**

4.1 It is recommended that this application is approved as a departure to policy MIN 8 subject to the conditions appended below.

#### Conditions/Reason

##### Timescale

01. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

##### Approved Plans and Documents

02. The development to which this permission relates shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plan(s) referenced.

##### Plans

Location Plan NES217-SL2-R01

Existing Site Plan NES217-SL3-R02

Proposed Site Plan NES217-SL1-R05

Site Schematic NES217-ES2-R00

Proposed Site Plan Array Layout NES217-DD4-R02

Proposed Plans Transformer and Solar DB Enclosure Detail NES217-DD2-R03

Proposed Elevations Ground Mounted Array NES217-DD1-R02

Construction Site Deliveries Access Plan NES217-SL5-00

##### Documents

Wooperton Sawmill Solar Panel Farm Flood Risk Assessment Issue Date: 23 JANUARY 2023 Report Number: 23001-FRA Produced by Coast Consulting Ltd  
Proposed Drainage Strategy Drawing 01 Rev P1 Produced by Coast Consulting dated 09/03/2023

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning, and to achieve a satisfactory form of development in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and the Local Plan.

##### Boundary Treatment

03. The development shall not be occupied until details of the proposed boundary treatment have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved details shall be implemented before the development is occupied.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity, security, and highway safety, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and policies TRA 2 and ENV 2 of the Local Plan.

#### Landscape Maintenance

04. Maintenance of grass filter strips, infiltration trenches and bunding shall be undertaken throughout the lifetime of development.

Reason: To ensure that the scheme to dispose of surface water operates at its full potential throughout the development's lifetime.

#### Vegetation Cover

05. Vegetation cover under the solar panels shall be present and maintained throughout the lifetime of development. Any erosion shall be rectified and made right.

To minimise the risk of soil erosion and reduce runoff rates.

#### Construction and Delivery Management

06. The development to which this permission relates shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plan(s) referenced 'Construction Traffic Management Plan and Delivery Management Plan' and 'Proposed Site Plan' received on 04 September 2023.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning, and to achieve a satisfactory form of development in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and Policies TRA1, TRA2 and TRA4 of the Northumberland Local Plan.

#### Implementation of car parking area

07. The development shall not be brought into use until the car parking area indicated on the approved plans has been implemented in accordance with the approved plans. Thereafter, the car parking area shall be retained in accordance with the approved plans and shall not be used for any purpose other than the parking of vehicles associated with the development.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy TRA4 of the Northumberland Local Plan.

#### Expiry of Permission

08. The development hereby permitted shall be for a temporary period only to expire 40 years and 6 months after the first export date of the development. Written confirmation of the first export date shall be provided to the local planning authority within one month after the event.

Reason: The development is not considered suitable for permanent retention and to enable the impacts to be assessed as to the impacts on the landscape character and visual amenity in accordance with Policy ENV 3 and Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan

#### Decommissioning Due to Inoperation

09. If the solar farm hereby permitted ceases to operate for a continuous period of 12 months, then a scheme for the decommissioning and removal of the solar farm and ancillary equipment together with the restoration of the site shall be submitted within

6 months of the end of the cessation period to the Local Planning Authority for written approval. The scheme shall make provision for:

- a. the removal of the solar panels and associated above ground works approved under this permission;
- b. the management and timing of any works;
- c. a traffic management plan to address traffic impact issues during the decommissioning period;
- d. an environmental management plan to include details of measures to be taken during the decommissioning period to protect wildlife and habitats;
- e. details of site restoration; and
- f. an implementation timetable.

The decommissioning of the site shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme.

Reason: To ensure that the decommissioning and restoration of the site is carried out in a managed approach that minimises the impacts on the natural, built, and historic environment and upon highway safety in accordance with Policies REN 1, TRA 2 and ENV 1, ENV 2, ENV 3, ENV 4 and ENV 7 of the Northumberland Local Plan.

#### Decommissioning Scheme

10. Within a period of 39 years and 6 months following the first export date, a scheme for the decommissioning of the solar farm and its ancillary equipment and restoration of the site, shall be submitted to written approval by the Local Planning Authority (except if Condition 4 has been triggered and decommissioning has been completed). The scheme shall incorporate the criteria set out within Condition 4 as a minimum. The decommissioning of the site shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme.

Reason: To ensure that the decommissioning and restoration of the site is carried out in a managed approach that minimises the impacts on the natural, built, and historic environment and upon highway safety in accordance with Policies REN 1, TRA 2 and ENV 1, ENV 2, ENV 3, ENV 4 and ENV 7 of the Northumberland Local Plan.

#### Decommissioning and restoration time

11. The solar farm and its ancillary equipment shall be dismantled and removed from the site and the land restored in accordance with the approved decommissioning and restoration scheme within a period of 40 years and 6 months following the first export date.

Reason: In the interests of natural, built, and historic environment in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan.

#### Artificial Lighting

12. No external lighting (other than low level lighting required on ancillary buildings during occasional maintenance and inspection visits), or Floodlighting is permitted to be installed, used, or modified as part of the hereby approved development without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority. To apply for consent the operator must provide a detailed report of the proposed lighting which details:

- a. The specific location of all external lighting units;
- b. Design of all lighting units;
- c. Details of beam orientation and lux levels; and

Any proposed measures such as motion sensors and timers that will be used on lighting units

Reason: To protect residential amenity and provide a commensurate level of protection against artificial light, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy POL 2 and Policy REN 1 of the Northumberland Local Plan.

#### Biodiversity Mitigation

13. From first use of the development hereby approved, the grassland habitat beneath the solar panels shall be enhanced through a less intensive management regime as set out in Section 6.2 and Appendix 3 of the Ecological Impact Assessment (Update) Land Northeast of Wooperton Station (StationSawmill\_UeclA\_v1.3) by Durham Dakes Ecology including:

- a. Reduced levels of grazing to allow for a varied sward height (at least 20% of the sward height will be <7cm and at least 20% of the sward will be >7cm in height).
- b. Control of invasive non-native species, such as Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*).

The grassland shall be maintained in this manner for the lifetime of the development.

Reason: To provide mitigate impacts on biodiversity in line with the NPPF and Local Plan Policy ENV2.

#### Access Gates

14. Access gates to the site from the B6346 shall not at any time open to obstruct the public road.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and in accordance with policy TRA 2.

#### Informative

##### Highway condition survey

You should note that a highway condition survey should be carried out before the commencement of demolition and construction vehicle movements from this site.

To arrange a survey, contact Highway Development Management at [highwaysplanning@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:highwaysplanning@northumberland.gov.uk).

##### Reminder to not store building material or equipment on the highway

Building materials or equipment shall not be stored on the highway unless otherwise agreed. You are advised to contact the StreetWorks team on 0345 600 6400 for Skips and Containers licences.

##### Reminder to not deposit mud/ debris/rubbish on the highway

In accordance with the Highways Act 1980 mud, debris or rubbish shall not be deposited on the highway.

#### Biodiversity and Solar Developments

With appropriate land management, solar farms have the potential to support wildlife and enhance local biodiversity. Published guidance from the BRE providing high level

guidance on solar farms and biodiversity is available online  
<https://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/pdf/Brochures/NSC-Biodiversity-Guidance.pdf>

#### Aspirational Alnwick to Cornhill DRT Route

Officers are in receipt of an ambitious project to open the disused Alnwick to Cornhill rail route to pedestrians, cyclists etc. Although this is not a right of way or recognised core path, we would encourage the applicant to consider this connection with their development and potential provide land for a detour allowing this ambition to be realised.

**Date of Report: 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

**Background Papers:** Planning application file(s) 23/00545/RENE